

## ECONOMIC GROWTH, AGRICULTURE AND TRADE

## Brazilian Youth Learn to Build Computers



*Crossing the digital divide. Unemployed youth build computers from scratch at a training center on the outskirts of Recife.*

**RECIFE, Brazil**—It is fairly easy to take a computer apart. All you need is a screwdriver and a bit of courage. But imagine trying to put it all back together again. That's the challenge facing hundreds of unemployed youth in Brazil.

Coming from some of the poorest slums, these young people need jobs. To get a good job, they need skills. Right now, demand is booming in Brazil for computer technicians with just the most fundamental skills. Knowing how to break down and put back together a basic desktop computer is precisely the kind of ticket needed to get a good job.

Recife, the capital of the state of Pernambuco, is home to inviting sand beaches and gleaming office towers, as well as one of the highest proportions of *favela* (slum) residents in the country. Youth constitute the largest group in the population, and their prospects for future employment are cloudy at best. Girls and young women are particularly at risk.

"Their computer training will begin with the fundamentals," said Marcelo Fernandes, President of the Council for Democracy and Informatics (CDI). "Youth from the poorest neighborhoods will hold computer parts in their hands as they learn about their basic functions."

The parts will come from computers donated by Brazilian businesses and individuals who otherwise would have thrown them away. Instead, the trainees will learn to build new computers that will be donated to CDI internet training centers.

This innovative training program—and the network of internet centers that house it—are part of USAID/Brazil's work to address the employment needs of the country's disadvantaged youth.

The Alliance for Digital Opportunity for Technology and Communication (DOT-COM) program of the Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture and

Trade will assist the mission in designing the curriculum, focusing in particular on the needs of girls and young women. Internships with the private sector will also be established to assure that the training leads to employment.

Each trainee will build at least one computer. If enough parts can be found, the student will build a second computer that he or she will receive as a graduation present. ★

To sign up for *DOT-Comments*, the DOT-COM newsletter, visit [www.dot-com-alliance.org](http://www.dot-com-alliance.org).

### INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

USAID has applied information and communication technologies (ICT) to development for over 30 years. More recently, the Agency has been working to increase access to remote areas of the world. Activities include the 1995 Leland Initiative, which brought the internet to Africa; the 1998 worldwide Internet for Economic Development Initiative; and the upcoming Bush Administration Digital Freedom Initiative. The work included getting telecommunications policy right, opening competition, decreasing costs, and increasing services to underserved areas.

ICT activities have been tightly integrated into the following:

- ◆ a Mayan language teacher-training program in Guatemala
- ◆ handheld computers that track wildlife in Namibia
- ◆ training for Moroccan women parliamentarians
- ◆ e-commerce training for small and medium enterprises in Mexico
- ◆ online services in Romania

The DOT-COM program focuses as well on critical national policy reforms and learning systems that will make the information revolution more accessible to all.

## GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE

## Royal Ahold's Fruit and Vegetable Alliance

The world's largest food sales company has found a way to improve the lives of people in Africa—after meetings with USAID experts. The firm is using its knowledge in food marketing to help pineapple and other agricultural growers improve their farming techniques and output.

The Dutch Royal Ahold company sent senior team members to Africa to find ways the giant food firm could "make a meaningful contribution to economic development in regions of the world that do not yet have the same opportunities we have," according to the company CEO Cees Van der Hoeven.

But instead of building schools and offering scholarships, the company was persuaded to use its special knowledge of mass marketing of foods such as pineapples.

In Ghana, Ahold staffers met with USAID Senior Agricultural Economist Fenton Sands and Ivor Knight of the Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade, who suggested that the company could make a real difference by doing what it did best: using its private-sector experience to encourage professional standards for agricultural producers in Ghana.

The company agreed to encourage small- and medium-sized exporters of pineapples and other products to change the varieties of the foods they produced and to improve the quality and packaging standards to meet requirements for exports to the European Union.

Finding business lines that could be developed resulted from Ahold's

expertise in food and personal products, in partnership with USAID and its NGO and private sector partners.

"Ahold realized it could do tremendous good by using its purchasing power as an incentive for growers," said Sands.

Sands and others from the Bureau for Africa pulled together a group of NGOs including CARE, TechnoServe, and AMEX International. A Michigan State University project, Partnerships for Food Industry Development, was recruited to bring agricultural and food marketing expertise and to help manage the alliance.

The success of the alliance will be determined by the amounts of pineapples and other goods that Ahold or other buyers purchase from these small growers.

To ensure the activity has an impact on farmers' incomes, Ahold has budgeted more than \$2 million over the next three years and has placed a full-time person in Ghana. Ahold also sent their buyer from the United States to explore cosmetic products created from shea butter.

USAID intends to not only bring financial resources to the table but is—as part of the Agency's renewed focus on agriculture—working on creating an innovative way to produce pineapple "suckers" (the bulbs used to plant pineapples) at half the cost of imported ones for Ghanaian farmers. The farmers, many of whom will participate in the pineapple export activity with Ahold, will be able to purchase suckers of the variety that a discriminating buyer like Ahold needs to meet the demands of its consumers. ★

[www.usaid.gov/gda](http://www.usaid.gov/gda)



Photo courtesy of Pineapple Exporters of Ghana

*The alliance between Royal Ahold and USAID aims to increase the quality and amount of pineapples exported from Ghana.*